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SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Draft agreed conclusions submitted by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Mr. Alyaksandr Sychou (Belarus)

1. The Economic and Social Council is addressing the theme of "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian activities of the United Nations system" in its first humanitarian segment. Previous relevant resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 and its annex, including the guiding principles contained therein, provide the basis of this discussion.

2. The Council takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/53/139-E/1998/67). It welcomes progress made in strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, and wishes to give guidance for further developments in this direction.

3. The Council reiterates the need for coordinated humanitarian assistance and adequate financial resources to ensure an ongoing capacity for a prompt, timely and effective response by the United Nations system to natural disasters and other emergencies, both for immediate relief and for the smooth transition between relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and long-term development, which are not necessarily sequential and often proceed at the same time.

4. The Council reaffirms that humanitarian operations are generally implemented through close cooperation among Governments and the United Nations, its agencies, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. The magnitude and duration of many emergencies may be beyond the response capacity of many affected countries. International cooperation to address emergency situations and strengthen the response capacity of affected

countries is thus of great importance. Such cooperation should be provided in accordance with international law and national laws. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations working impartially and with strictly humanitarian motives should continue to make a significant contribution in supplementing national efforts.

5. The Council is concerned by the growing number of natural disasters and environmental emergencies which often strike countries that lack the resources to cope with them adequately.

6. The Council affirms its support for the principles and norms of international humanitarian law, and stresses the urgent need to ensure respect for and promotion of these principles and norms. The Council is also concerned by the increasingly difficult context in which humanitarian assistance in some areas takes place, in particular the continuous erosion, in many cases, of the respect for international humanitarian law and principles, through deliberate violence both against civilians, particularly women and children, and aid workers. The Council welcomes the continued efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to prevent the targeting of women and children in conflict situations, stop the recruitment and use of children as soldiers in hostilities in violation of international law, and support the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. The Council notes the importance of engaging a much wider segment of civil society in raising awareness for humanitarian issues and respect for international humanitarian law and principles, and in supporting humanitarian programmes.

7. The Council reaffirms General Assembly resolution 52/167 of 16 December 1997 on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, in which the Assembly calls upon all Governments and parties in complex humanitarian emergencies, in particular armed conflicts and post-conflict situations, in countries where humanitarian personnel are operating, in conformity with the relevant provisions of international law and national laws, to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel in order to allow them to perform efficiently their task of assisting the affected civilian population, including refugees and internally displaced persons. The Council also reaffirms the necessity for all humanitarian personnel to respect the national laws of the countries in which they are operating.

8. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, in cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, should ensure that a gender perspective is fully integrated into humanitarian activities and policies.

9. The Council welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations system, in particular through the creation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, with its three core functions of policy development and coordination, advocacy of humanitarian issues and coordination of humanitarian emergency response, as well as the guiding objectives of the Office in implementing the reforms. It fully supports the leadership role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator for the ongoing coordination of humanitarian

assistance activities and prioritization of programmes within United Nations Consolidated Appeals. The Council notes that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is responsible for sharing all relevant information with the United Nations Mine Action Service, the focal point within the United Nations system for all mine-related activities, and other partners on the humanitarian implications of landmines, and will work to ensure that humanitarian needs are met as an integral component of the overall humanitarian endeavour.

10. The Council commends the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination for its efforts to achieve coherent coordination structures at the field level and to promote, at the inter-agency level, a clear division of responsibilities and ensure accountability, as well as for improving the reporting modalities by the funds and programmes on their humanitarian assistance activities. The Council welcomes the use of inter-agency negotiating teams led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to advocate the respect of humanitarian principles in the field and the development of contingency planning.

11. The Council notes with satisfaction the designation of the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the focal point for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), and also notes the adoption by IASC of the guiding principles on IDPs, and encourages the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in fulfilling this function, to work closely with all agencies and organizations involved, in particular with the Representative of the Secretary-General on IDPs, who will report to the Commission of Human Rights on his efforts and on the views expressed to him on these guiding principles.

12. The Council shares the view of the Secretary-General that the resident coordinator should normally coordinate the humanitarian assistance activities of the United Nations by assuming the dual function of resident/humanitarian coordinator. Other mechanisms, namely the appointment of a humanitarian coordinator distinct from the resident coordinator and the designation of a lead agency as well as the appointment of a regional coordinator, might be justified under appropriate circumstances. The Council fully supports enhanced efforts to clarify the parameters of authority for the resident/humanitarian coordinator functions, the establishment of selection criteria and procedures, and specific training and performance review mechanisms for humanitarian coordinators, and encourages the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and IASC to pursue these goals vigorously. The Council encourages all United Nations funds and programmes to cooperate fully in developing and maintaining a roster of qualified candidates.

13. The Council calls upon the Secretary-General to develop emergency rules and procedures to ensure a rapid response to humanitarian crises, as requested in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

14. The Council welcomes the emphasis in the report of the Secretary-General on the issues of natural disasters and environmental emergencies, and reaffirms the importance it attaches to this aspect of the Emergency Relief Coordinator's mandate. The Council reaffirms that disaster reduction forms an integral part

of the sustainable development strategies and national development plans of vulnerable countries and communities. The Council stresses that disaster preparedness and early warning must be further strengthened at country and regional levels, inter alia, through better coordination among relevant United Nations bodies and cooperation with interested Governments, regional organizations and other relevant sectors, in order to maximize the effectiveness of natural disaster response, in particular in developing countries. Particular efforts should be undertaken to enhance local capacity in disaster response, as well as to utilize capacities already existing in developing countries which may be available closer to the site of a disaster and at lower cost. The Council commends the work of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams in providing rapid need assessments and facilitating the coordination of disaster response. The Council takes note that a review of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) will take place at the substantive session of 1999 of the Council.

15. The Council commends the Emergency Relief Coordinator for his efforts in implementing General Assembly resolution 52/200 entitled 'International cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon' and invites the United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on El Niño to provide its experiences on national capacity programmes for disaster management as an input to the development of the disaster reduction strategy for the twenty-first century.

16. The Council recognizes the contributions made by donor Governments to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance and notes that the unearmarked contributions to the reserve of this Trust Fund could usefully be increased, and therefore strongly encourages further contributions to this reserve.

17. The Council recognizes that the phases of relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development are generally not consecutive but often overlap and occur simultaneously. It also recognizes that a "relief/development gap" may occur in countries emerging from crisis which maybe addressed, inter alia, through a strategic framework, to be developed in consultation with Governments. The Council notes the need to develop, through a strategic framework, when appropriate, a comprehensive approach to countries in crisis, in which key aspects of durable recovery, peace-building, all human rights, sustained economic growth and sustainable development, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences, are included. The development of such a comprehensive approach must involve national authorities as well as the United Nations system, donors and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. National authorities must take a leading role in all aspects of the recovery plan. In this context, the Council welcomes the recognition by the World Bank of the need for its entry into an early dialogue with humanitarian agencies and to participate from the outset in effective coordination mechanisms in relation to countries emerging from crisis. The Council stresses that strengthening capacities to enable societies in post-conflict situations to manage their own affairs is a critical factor for recovery and development. In this context, the roles and responsibilities of Governments are important.

18. The Council underlines that the consolidated appeal process (CAP) remains the principal resource mobilization tool for humanitarian assistance. The Council stresses the importance of ensuring adequate funding for humanitarian activities, in particular of consolidated appeals. It welcomes efforts to prioritize needs and to enhance capabilities so as to better take into account linkages with development-oriented activities which should continue to be intensified. It underlines that the consolidated appeals process should be carried out in full collaboration with United Nations bodies and other relevant humanitarian organizations, international financial institutions, donors and host Governments as an important step towards a more integrated and strategic approach. It stresses that contributions to humanitarian assistance should not be provided at the expense of development assistance. The Council encourages the efforts to improve the format and structure of the CAP so as to make them effective programming instruments for the purpose of strategic planning. The Council further stresses that strengthened United Nations humanitarian activities must be supported by adequate responses to all United Nations humanitarian appeals. Broadening the base of the donors may contribute to an increased response to appeals. The Council stresses that the response to international appeals should not be overly influenced by the levels of media interest, and must be commensurate with the needs of the affected population.

19. The Council invites the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, for its consideration, his proposals for putting the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on a sound financial basis for the coordination of humanitarian assistance activities.

20. The Council stresses the importance of ensuring an overall accountability of humanitarian actors. It supports the development by IASC of a field-based system for strategic monitoring which will help assess how programme targets and strategic objectives are being met.

21. The Council affirms the importance of discussion of policies and activities in the humanitarian area in the Council and the General Assembly. The Council requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with Governments, to recommend, at its organizational session, ways in which the humanitarian segment may be enhanced so as to strengthen the role of the Council as regards the coordination and policy guidance of United Nations system humanitarian activities, taking fully into account the outcome and views expressed by Member States during the substantive session of 1998 of the Council.

22. The Council requests the Secretary-General to report to the Council at its next humanitarian segment on the implementation of/follow-up to these agreed conclusions.